

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

United States Department of Agriculture

Extension Service
and Land-Grant University
Cooperative Extension Services

aHV1431
.Y67
1991

YOUTH



The American Agenda

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY

1 1 1992



America's youth and families are in a crisis of epidemic proportions. Solving that crisis must be at the very top of the American agenda—the Nation's future depends on it.

The symptoms of the crisis are easy to see—illiteracy, school dropouts, child abuse, teenage sex and pregnancy, substance abuse, peer pressure, depression, homelessness, and suicide, to name a few. The challenge is not only to treat the symptoms; it is to eliminate the **causes**.

Extension Cares

The youth crisis is a high priority for the Cooperative Extension System—the federal-state-local educational arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and America's land-grant universities. "Youth at Risk" is one of Extension's seven "National Initiatives."

Extension's delivery network is anchored in local communities. In addition to the combined expertise and resources of federal, state, and local governments, it draws on the support of nearly 3 million volunteers. Strong linkages with both public and private groups are also crucial to Extension's vitality and strength.

The Cooperative Extension System is uniquely qualified to focus on youth and family issues. Extension has proven experience and expertise in:

- working in and with local school systems;
- managing 4-H—a successful youth development program already reaching 5.4 million youth;
- teaching parenting and related family development skills;
- recruiting, training, and managing volunteers;
- developing and guiding youth peer groups;
- delivering nutrition and health education programs;

- accessing the technical and research expertise of the total university and faculty; and
- building community coalitions.

Partnerships for Progress

What is Extension's "secret for success?" Don't work alone—involve others at all levels to attack problems together, using the unique expertise of each cooperator to the best advantage.

Extension partners with other land-grant university educators; with federal, state, and local agencies; and with school systems, churches, the United Way, youth organizations, intergenerational advocates, and others.

The Nation's support networks have allowed too many young people to "fall through." These networks must be expanded and strengthened. Community leaders, public and private officials, and educators must find **better** ways to work together to meet the needs of families and children. The Cooperative Extension System can be the catalyst for change.

Moving Into Action

Things already are happening! At 69 selected sites throughout the Nation, communities recently focused on the highest priority needs of youth, thanks to \$7.5 million in federal Extension funds, \$8 million in state and local dollars, and \$6 million in private funding.

The private funds, from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, established seven "Centers for Action" to provide nationwide technical assistance for these sites and other youth-at-risk efforts.

This public/private partnership is addressing three critical areas:

- School-age child care education—26 sites, two Centers for Action.
- Coalitions for community programming with high-risk youth—30 sites, three Centers for Action.
- Development of reading literacy and technological literacy—13 sites, two Centers for Action.

A new coalition building model for communities targeting alcohol and substance abuse prevention, is a joint effort of USDA- Extension Service, the National 4-H Council, and the U.S. Departments of Justice and Transportation.

In public housing developments in eight cities, the USDA- Extension Service and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are cooperating to bring consumer education to young people and their families. Funded by a grant from Kraft General Foods, the demonstration projects are focusing on consumer decisionmaking, nutrition, and family management.

Program Examples



ARIZONA—The Phoenix Coalition for Youth and Families, a network of volunteers and 15 community agencies, is developing a pilot program for children in an impoverished Phoenix housing complex. The goal is to lower the 73-percent rate of high school dropouts, reduce teen pregnancy and improve teen parenting, reduce substance abuse, and encourage involvement in community and teen leadership activities.



IDAHO—Bannock County's mentoring program, "A Student Friend," will place a male and female volunteer as mentors and role models in each of 15 elementary schools. The volunteers will provide listening, caring, and reassuring friendship to youth; help students in crises; contact parents and school authorities about problems; and give the children help, love, and support.



KENTUCKY—The Harlan Youth Employability Program targets all youth in grades K through 8, and their parents, throughout the Harlan Independent School System. Developed to enhance career awareness and raise educational aspirations, the multiagency project involves participants in further career exploration and career building skills.



MARYLAND—Parents and community organizations are actively involved in “Adventures in Science,” a science and math enrichment program recently expanded to include children from two at-risk multicultural, low-income communities in the state. Increasing youth interest in how things work in the physical environment, developing parental support, and increasing community involvement—are all program objectives.



MASSACHUSETTS—Extension is training local leaders in low-income areas of Worcester County to work within their own neighborhoods on problems of youth and families. A key element of the program is a 2-week summer day camp for 6- to 12-year-olds, made possible by a coalition of area services and businesses. The camp concept will be broadened to include year-round afterschool activities.



MISSISSIPPI—An afterschool child care and education program that is serving the children of 486 families in the South Delta HUD housing project will provide a model for use in other federal housing projects. Both the 4-H and home economics departments of the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service are involved, as is Alcorn State University, which also will implement the program throughout a 13-county area in southwest Mississippi.



OHIO—The afterschool hours can be lonely, and even dangerous, for “latchkey” children. In one Ohio county, a coalition of Extension, schools, library, YMCA, the Children’s Services Agency, and civic groups is providing care for these youngsters. Tutoring to improve literacy is part of the program, and teen leaders will serve as role models, mentors, guides, and teachers. The program is free, but parents donate 3 hours each month to the center.



OKLAHOMA—Designed to educate adolescent parents about child development, the Home Visitation Program for Adolescent Mothers involves a community coalition of several health service and education agencies. Emphasizing prevention and intervention, the program addresses strengthening coalitions and preventing literacy problems and language delays in children.



OREGON—“Kid Konnection” is marshaling a coalition of service and education providers to give at least 150 high-risk 7- to 11-year-olds skills in music, movement, drama, photography, and visual arts that can be shared with families and the public through performances and exhibitions. The goals are to build self-esteem, contribute to positive behaviors, spur academic improvement, and help integrate high-risk families into the greater community.



TEXAS—A lack of English language skills is a major factor in the cycle of poverty that entraps many Hispanic youths. Through a 4-H literacy program, a public/private community coalition in Houston is increasing the physical, social, and emotional skills of Hispanic young people; enhancing the parenting abilities of their parents; and giving teens a chance to improve their leadership and citizenship skills by serving as teachers and volunteers.



UTAH—More than 30 organizations are working with Extension to implement Project CARES (Children-at-Risk Extended School), an afterschool program at three high-risk elementary schools. CARES focuses on increasing literacy, fostering the development of self-esteem, and establishing strong social and interpersonal skills. The program also will include parenting classes, family activities, and a monthly newsletter for parents.

Summit Meetings on Youth

More than 700 people from Extension, other agencies, and the private sector convened in 1990 for a national "Summit Meeting" to lay the groundwork for a concerted attack on the problems of America's at-risk youth. Using satellite communication, Summit II in 1991 linked federal, state, and county Extension offices across the country in a 3-hour conference focused on Extension's response to the Nation's youth and family crisis.

The Future Is Now

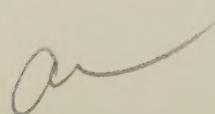
A sense of urgency exists across America—a feeling that it is time to take action against the years of neglect of children and families. The social and economic implications of ignoring the urgent needs of the next generation of Americans are staggering. With the right support, all of America's youth will have a chance to become healthy, productive, contributing adults.

Extension already has met with much success in mobilizing human and financial resources to rescue youth from conditions that lead to failure and despair. Cooperation, not competition, is the key. Will enough communities, organizations, agencies, and individuals be willing to work together to meet the challenge throughout the Nation? America's youth hope the answer is "yes."

The Cooperative Extension System, a national educational network established through legislation, is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state land-grant universities, and county governments.

August 1989

Slightly revised, August 1991





The Cooperative Extension System's programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, sex, handicap, religion, age, or national origin.